



# Senses of belonging when living in foster care families: Insights from children's video diaries

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Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson   
and Stine Tankred Luckow

VIVE – The Danish Center for Social Science Research, Denmark

## Abstract

This article explores how children living in foster care create senses of belonging across diverse family relationships. It draws on video diaries made by 11 Danish children living in foster care. For the analysis, we have selected two video diaries, made by two girls, aged 12 and 15 years, who live in foster care and have regular contact with their birth family. The girls differ in their senses of belonging but both reflectively negotiate this across their family relationships creating more or less emotional, physical and functional attachments with their foster care and birth families.

## Keywords

Belonging, everyday, family relationships, foster care, video diaries

## Introduction

In this article, we analyse how children living in foster care in Denmark create senses of belonging across the multiple family settings forming their everyday life. Children's perspectives on living in foster care have attracted increased attention in childhood studies with studies focused on the child's relationships with their foster care and birth families (Biehal, 2014; see Holland, 2009; Holland and Crowley, 2013; Luster et al., 2010; Raghallaigh and Sirriyeh, 2015). When children, for various reasons, cannot live with their birth family, foster care has, in Denmark as well as internationally, increasingly become the first choice (Fernandez and Barth, 2010). This development and the fact that being placed in foster care is a life-altering childhood event ensure the continued relevance of studying children's perspectives on life in foster care.

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### Corresponding author:

Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson, VIVE – The Danish Center for Social Science Research, Herluf Trolles Gade 11, 1052 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

Email: [ttb@vive.dk](mailto:ttb@vive.dk)

While most families can be said to be complicated and diverse in structures and practices (Morgan, 2011), this is certainly the case for children living in traditional foster care. Children placed in traditional foster care are moving into ‘an intimate world of strangers’ (Rees and Pithouse, 2008: 338) and are thus unaccustomed with the specific family practices of the foster family (Luckow, 2019). The children must find ways to navigate between new and old family relations and ‘make sense of their location within and across birth and substitute families to create a sense of belonging to one or both families’ (Biehal, 2014: 956). Consequently, they have to find ways to navigate between different family settings and, in this span of old and new family relations, create senses of belonging. Following May (2011: 368), belonging can be defined as ‘identification with one’s social, relational and material surroundings’ and a sense of being ‘at home’. Belonging in family relations is thus not a state to be accomplished once and for all, but rather an ongoing achievement through dynamic practices (May, 2011). As Bennett (2014) argues, belonging is often an unconscious part of everyday life, perhaps first considered when one does not feel it. Children placed in foster care experience a change (sometimes several) in their everyday family setting, and as they move between different potential ‘belonging settings’ their senses of belonging can become conscious. Belonging then becomes an explicit process of revealing if and how they ‘feel comfortable, at home, at place’ (Bennett, 2014: 1) in their respective family settings. In childhood studies, the concept of belonging has recently been applied to migration research, exploring children with a migration background and their sense of belonging (see Bak and von Brömssen, 2010; Den Besten, 2010; McGovern and Devine, 2016). Results from this research show that children’s own understanding of belonging is fluid and how a focus on children’s constructions of belonging must allow for nuance and ambiguity (Kaukko and Wernesjö, 2017).

In this article, we draw from a sample of 11 video diaries made by Danish children living in foster care. For the purpose of the analysis, we have selected two video diaries made by two girls, aged 12 and 15, living in foster care, to investigate how they create senses of belonging in their everyday lives. In analysing the girls’ videos, we demonstrate how foster children can ascribe meaning and functionality to their family relations across different family settings and in this process create varying senses of belonging. The video diaries offer meaningful snapshots into the girls’ emotional and practical everyday lives as children growing up in foster care families.

## **Background: Senses of belonging for children living in foster care**

In Denmark, 60% of all placements of children in care are in foster families. Most children in care come from split families (85%) and most continue to have contact with their birth families (89% continue to see their mother and 65% their father) (Lausten and Jørgensen, 2017). Thus, the majority of children in foster care have to relate to multiple family settings as part of everyday life. However, as demonstrated in studies of children living in foster care, navigating between different family settings can be challenging and influences the child’s relationships and senses of belonging (Ahmed et al., 2015; Biehal,

2014; Christiansen et al., 2013; Holland and Crowley, 2013; Rees and Pithouse, 2008; Sen and Broadhurst, 2011; Skoog et al., 2015). When focusing on the children's own experiences of living in foster care, these studies show that most children value their relationship with their birth families, especially when the contact is professionally supported and regulated based on the child's needs (Sen and Broadhurst, 2011).

In their study on long-term foster care, Christiansen et al. (2013) found that most children felt a sense of belonging to both their foster care and birth families. However, they also learned that the complexity of navigating between different family settings could entail ambiguous experiences and often stressful emotional conflicts for the child (Christiansen et al., 2013). Biehal (2014) identified factors that shaped long-term foster care children's senses of belonging, including their mental representations of past and current experiences in respective family settings as well as the meanings they ascribed to family relationships. Certain family practices, such as teasing and joking around and spending time together doing things together are found to create 'warmth' and belonging in the foster care family (Hedin et al., 2012).

Not surprisingly, instabilities in family relationships are found to influence the child's future sense of belonging (Skoog et al., 2015). In her work on young care leaver's experiences with 'family', Boddy (2018) concludes that '[r]elationships may simultaneously be experienced as positive and negative, supportive and concerning – and may feel more or less like family over time'. Family relationships of children living in foster care are thus not static but influenced by both official and unofficial interactions across time and settings.

## **Using video diaries to study children's family relationships in foster care**

Within childhood studies discussions on how to best capture the voice and experiences of children has been intensely debated (see Canosa et al., 2018), and the use of alternative methods, such as video diaries, has been welcomed (Noyes, 2008; Ross et al., 2009). The use of video diaries in our study derives from our desire to provide children with an image-saturated way of telling about their everyday family life (Sturken and Cartwright, 2008). Video diaries are not simply about the images filmed, but a method that allowed us as researchers insight into the children's everyday practices and how they negotiate their position as children in foster care in a subtle and non-intrusive manner (Bennett, 2014).

Everyday lives in families are not easily accessible for research because family practices are often mundane and un-reflected, that is, activities that we engage simply going about our lives. To secure empirical openness towards what the children 'do', the theoretical definition of family relationships that we use in the study is highly flexible and can be narrowed down to sets of activities performed with reference to some other family member or family practice (Morgan, 2011: 6–7). We do not conceptualise the children in our study as having multiple families but rather as being part of multiple family relationships and settings. The aim here is to place the child, not the families, in the centre of the analyses.

In our study of everyday life in foster care, we asked 11 children living in eight foster care families to make video diaries over a short period (from 1 week to 3 weeks). Seven girls and four boys, ages 8–15, made video diaries that provided significant insight into their everyday lives, navigating between different family settings. However, the video diaries of two girls, Veronica and Sara (pseudonyms), provided especially nuanced and rich expressions of their everyday lives in foster care. In these two diaries, the girls voice how they ascribe meaning and function to diverse family relations and how they, in different ways, create senses of belonging across family relations. Both girls remember having lived with their birth families and had, at the time of the study, regular contact with their families. By analysing the girls' diaries, against the backdrop of existing knowledge about everyday life in foster care families, it is possible to get insight into the multiple ways in which the children practice their family lives and how these practices influence their sense of belonging (Bengtsson and Mølholt, 2018; Biehal, 2014; Boddy, 2018; Ward, 2011).

### *Methods: children making video diaries for research*

Analysing and representing children's lives as they experience them are necessarily shaped by the questions that we, as researchers, frame and put to children and by the children's relationship to us as adults (Brannen et al., 2000). We designed the study to include the more participatory-oriented method of video diaries in addition to semi-structured interviews. With the video diaries we wanted to explore if these could provide meaningful insights into the children's everyday routines, material worlds, family relationships and sense of belonging (Holland, 2009).

The children were introduced to the video diary in their foster care home and the foster parents and other children in the family were also invited to make video diaries. We made it clear that the child was not required to participate, which was integral to our adopting the notion of 'becoming participant' to observe his or her consent as a relational and ongoing part of our dialog with each one (Renold et al., 2008). We informed the children that they would get a copy of their videos and that we would be the only one to watch them in addition to anyone they chose to show it to. The children were given a small digital camera together with a short introduction to the camera's functions. We also told the children that we would like them to make the diaries for 3 days or more to help us understand what it was like to live in foster care. We presented the children with an example of a video diary made by a 11-year-old girl and also provided them with a single sheet of paper listing examples of what to talk about (such as 'What does your day look like?' and 'What do you like to do?'). We made sure to stress that there was no 'right way' to make the videos, and that they could make them exactly as they would like.

Out of the 11 children (aged 8–15), the younger ones tended to make videos of themselves playing or filming their room. The older children, aged 12 to 15, made videos where they were talking to the camera, either in their private rooms or outside the foster care homes, and often on the move on their way to or from school (see also Ross et al., 2009).

The older children, and especially Veronica (age 12) and Sara (age 15), made lengthy recordings providing us with detailed visual snapshots of their everyday lives in foster

care and their personal experiences of being in care. They commented on family and peer relationships and shared fun and emotional moments with us in their videos. Both Veronica and Sara befriended the camera (us) with smiles and other positive expressions and introduced themselves when switching the camera on (see also Warming, 2006). They often made a plan for what to say or film when turning on the cameras but then very quickly moved on to more spontaneous content and sharing of private thoughts and emotions (see also Noyes, 2008). Such sharing also raised ethical concerns, as addressed by Holland et al. (2010), about how far participation is actually desired by the children. Throughout the study, we tried to be critical of our own positioning as strangers and adults and to avoid imposing on the children's right to refuse participation and their right to privacy. In all written text, we altered personal details in the videos to protect their anonymity.

Veronica filmed her video diary during the Christmas holidays. Although she did not film every day, a total of 26 videos were made for a combined 24 minutes on six individual days. Sara had the camera for 1 week and filmed 9 videos over a 2-day period for a total 46 minutes. Both girls demonstrate confidence in making the videos and directly speak to us while filming, such as 'I'm not sure this will interest you' or 'I promised you [in the previous video] to film my room'. While these statements were no guarantee that the girls always took into account that their videos were not entirely private, it did tell us that they reflected about us being the future audience of their videos. We selected Sara and Veronica's video diaries because both address the circumstance of living in different family settings visually and in remarks. These circumstances are also visible in some of the other children's video diaries but not to the extent and with as many details as in Veronica and Sara's videos. Such variation in the children's video diaries points to Spyrou's (2016) important discussion around the role of silences when seeking to investigate children's voices, and how some of these children might be more willing or capable than others to share their experiences through video diaries. Their participation in a method like this connects to not only their age and maturity but also to their social positions and to the power dynamics between them, us and their social context's (Spyrou, 2016).

## Emotional belonging

In Veronica's first video she starts by introducing herself:

My name is Veronica, and I am 12 years old, and I have lived here for around 6 years (she lies on her stomach in bed in her room filming her face with a pillow under her chin) [cut]. The question I am asked the most is 'Do you miss your parents?' (squeezing the pillow with her left hand and looking behind the camera) and to that I answer (looking at the ceiling), 'Not really, because I know them and I meet them regularly' (looking into the camera). On that note I am really lucky compared to other foster care children or adoptive children (her legs swinging a little up and down in the background). And I know they are fine and here [the foster care home] I have lived for so long, and it is here that I feel so good. It is here I get up in the morning and here I go to bed every day. I just feel like it is my family and I know (a little laugh) they also think I am a part of them (looking away from the camera), and that (looking into the camera) I am really, really happy with. When people ask if I had the choice, would I then move back

home, I have to answer 'no', because it is something very different from here. It is indescribable because Lisa and Martin, my foster care parents . . . (pausing, looking away, smiling). It is just fantastic (looking at the camera with a big smile, and then lowering her voice and looking away), so I am really happy (then looking into the camera). And then I have two foster care sisters [cut]; we actually never really fight, not like that. So that is really good and they are also like my real sisters, but they are also in foster care [cut]. I also have three biological siblings, two younger sisters and one younger brother (smiling). So here I am the little sister and in my real family I am a big sister (looking away). I think that was it for now [cut]. (Section of Veronica's video 1, 02:58 minutes)

By answering questions that she often encounters, Veronica explains to us how she sees her family relationships. She clarifies that she is lucky to see her biological family, but that her everyday life – where she gets up in the morning and goes to bed in the evening – is her foster care family. She is emotionally moved when talking about how her foster care parents are her family. Importantly, this belonging does not eliminate her sense of being in family relationships with her biological parents and siblings. She is comparing the two families and highlights her different roles as a sister, and with her smile, appears to be emotionally comfortable in both sets of relationships. While Veronica demonstrates that she belongs in her family life, she also clearly addresses her knowledge that her family life is different from that of most other children (Holland and Crowley, 2013). She is explaining these differences to us as researchers, because we asked her about them, but the specific questions she raises are some that she has been asked several times by others. By being confronted with these questions, she is not only expected to reflect on her family relationships and living arrangement but also on her 'emotional intimacy' with her various family members (Morgan, 2011).

Despite having well-thought-out answers for these complex questions, they are emotionally sensitive for Veronica. She looks away from the camera to think about her wording and squeezes her pillow when explaining how she, contrary to what others expect, values her relationships with various family members regardless of their formal status. Her foster parents are especially 'fantastic', and unquestionably form Veronica's closest family relationship at the time of the video diary. Her knowledge that the foster parents also see her as part of their family supports her sense of belonging in the foster care family. Veronica starts the video by stating that she is 'really lucky' to be able to see her biological family, and ends the video by stressing that she is 'really happy' living in her foster care family. Veronica shows 'emotional belonging' where family connectedness is not specific to certain predefined relationships and where relationships are not expected to replace each other (Boddy, 2018; see also Hedin et al., 2012; Holland and Crowley, 2013).

## Functional belonging

Like Veronica, in her videos, Sara also tells us about her family relationships, her experiences of moving in with her foster care family 3 years ago and how she lives with two younger children who were also placed in foster care. In her second video, she tells us how she lives with her foster care family in a small town and she films her route to school, which passes through quiet streets with green surroundings and single-family

homes. She begins the video by explaining the classes she is about to attend in school and then moves on to talk about living in foster care:

[Cut] Now I feel like telling a little about what it feels like to live in a foster care family. At least at the moment (she clears her throat and holds up a hand on her chest). And I just want to say that I haven't lived in foster care my whole life (she holds her hand out to emphasize this point). I have (she exhales with a little sound) . . . When I was about 12 years old, in April 2012, I moved into a foster care family and I have lived there ever since. When I moved in, I did it because my parents were going through a rough time, so I decided by myself to go to foster care because I didn't need their problems in my life. When I moved into foster care I realized there was a lot I needed to catch up on in terms of school, and . . . so I did . . . It was mostly math I needed to catch up on, and I succeeded in that and I'm really happy about that. But the school that was supposed to help me, they didn't give me a lot of teaching so I got that from back home in the foster care family. So-o-o . . . it's been really tough to learn all these things. Many times I had been sitting for hours and just pondered over how to do a calculation (she looks serious into the camera and gestures with her hand), and it's been really hard for me but I feel like I more or less have learned it and I really appreciate that today. Now I can keep up; and when they found out I had learned what I needed, I transferred to a normal school (she looks to the sides and into the camera smiling) [cut]. I'm about to graduate and that's really cool and then I start secondary school [cut] and I'm really excited about that . . . But if I should say the positive things right now (her facial expression changes from smiling to a more thoughtful look), it is that I'm really grateful that they [the foster parents] have helped me. Even though it's been tough and I've had many mood swings, they have been there for me. They have understood it and they have accepted me for who I am and I think that's really nice, that's great. I'm also pretty happy I myself chose to go to foster care . . . So . . . yeah, those are the things I thought to share for now. (She smiles and continues here to speak about how much more schooling she has to complete and how she plans to film her video diary over the next few days.). (Section from Sara's video 2, 06:02 minutes)

Also like Veronica, Sara presents her foster parents as central relationships in her life, but she does not position them as members of her family in the same way. Sara is appreciative of their support and acceptance, but does not display intimate emotions towards her foster parents. Sara explains how her relationships with the foster parents are formed by the concrete practice of 'help with schoolwork', but also how this family practice does not exist in isolation from her relationship with her foster parents. While Sara is clearly embedded in her everyday world in the foster care family, her serious tone of voice and hand gestures underlining her gratefulness show that she does not take their help for granted.

By further stressing in her video that she herself has 'chosen' to live in foster care, Sara appears to take on the responsibility for the success of the placement. Her relationship with her foster parents does not seem to be one of strong emotional belonging but, as stressed by May (2011), experiences of not fully belonging need not always be negative. Sara appears to appreciate the help she gets from her foster parents and through their help creates a more rational sense of belonging focusing on functionality rather than emotional attachment. In her diaries, Sara continually stresses how her success in school is important to her, and how the foster parents' support has created opportunities that she would not otherwise have had. Furthermore, Sara does not herself express a desire for a stronger emotional attachment to her foster parents or the other children.

## Being 'at home' in the foster care family

Both Sara and Veronica show in their videos how they practice family relationships in ways that are meaningful and important to them. Both girls expressed happiness with being in foster care and their sense of belonging was implicit in their telling about the family's daily practices. However, their 'doing' of family life was influenced by relationships with foster parents. In her videos, Veronica shows various scenes of her everyday life in the house, telling us about the home as a shared place, such as 'this is *our* dog' and 'this is a picture of *our* house in France' (video 3, 01:51). These videos demonstrate that she has a strong emotional, material and physical attachment to the family home, a natural 'belonging-in-place' (Bennett, 2015).

In contrast, Sara films only in her room or outside the house and she does not talk about the household as a shared place in which she feels 'at home'. However, in a video where she is walking home from school, she films a meadow and reveals how she often goes to the meadow when she '[cut] needs to think about some things and when [she] just needs some fresh air [cut]' (Section from Sara's video 3, 04:10). Here, Sara shows that a site outside the foster care home has become a private space for her where she can think and be alone. Sara has formed an attachment to the meadow and through this experience discovered possibilities arising from living in a new neighbourhood in the countryside. She has created a sense of local belonging in a site close to the foster home.

In another video that Sara filmed on the first day of her video diary, she is in her room and sitting at her desk with a tablet in front of her. In the background, we see that the room is decorated with posters of musicians, actors, family photos and class pictures. It is evening and she tells about a household chore her foster parents have assigned her:

[Cut] On Tuesday I also have dinner-day, which means I have to cook for (fumes and rolls her eyes) five people (she drops her head to the desk in despair). Dinner for five people! And I also need to remove and clean the dishes afterwards. On the whole, I'll say that the dinner-day is not my favourite . . . I don't feel like . . . it's of course [because] I need to learn how to cook but I don't feel like at this age I need to learn it. It's okay to learn but it can be a bit of a pressure sometimes, [as] I don't have the desire to cook. [cut] I just feel like focusing on something else right now rather than learning how to cook . . . Some things are really difficult to say to my foster parents and I'm sure there are many others like me . . . I do trust them but I think I still need to trust them even more and I need more courage. I have tried to say to them that I don't feel like cooking – I'd much rather wash the dishes than cook. I like to do the dishes but for cooking, you need to be alert, make vegetables and prepare everything and time it all. [cut] (Section from Sara's video 5, 11:23)

In talking about the dinner chore, Sara reflects on aspects of her relationship with her foster parents, and how she lacks trust in them and the courage to say how she feels. In the video, she appears not to feel an emotional belonging with the foster parents, as she is not comfortable sharing her thoughts and disclosing herself (Morgan, 2011: 35). Conflicts over household chores can resemble situations in most other families with teenagers. However, there are significant differences that may influence Sara's everyday life in ways that are more substantial. Living in foster care, Sara is expected to adapt and blend into the unwritten practices of the foster care family for the placement to be

successful. Sara, as do most children living in care, knows that a long-time failure for her to conduct herself in an ‘acceptable’ manner could ultimately lead to breakdown of the placement (Skoog et al., 2015).

Sara speaks about the cooking chore several times in her video diary. She expresses conflicting emotions and is not only frustrated with the foster parents’ lack of understanding but also angry with herself for not doing the chore with enough initiative. In a video, she says, ‘[cut] Sometimes I feel really stupid. I feel like I need to say something to myself and kick myself to get myself going (she sounds sad and looks up into the ceiling) [cut]’. Later in the same video, she returns to her relationship with her foster parents and states that ‘[cut] You ought to have a right (she pauses and looks around), . . . to say no [cut]’ (Section from Sara’s video 6, 11:24). While the need to belong in the foster care family is powerful, Sara’s video also displays the often unequal power relations between child and adult found in most family relationships. As the child, she is told what to do by her foster parents, the adults, and feels that she has no say in the matter. Together with her earlier acknowledgement of the foster parents’ support for her schoolwork, she experiences their relationship as simultaneously ‘positive and negative, supportive, and concerning’ (Boddy, 2018: 21).

### **Navigating between family relationships in foster care**

In their videos both Veronica and Sara record how they navigate between foster and birth families and how their multiple relationships are ‘not always harmonious’ (Morgan, 2011: 52). Especially in one video, Veronica shows how navigating between her different family settings causes emotional conflicts and dilemmas (see also Christiansen et al., 2013). On day two of her video diary, she is with her biological father’s family on Christmas holiday. She films herself talking into the camera alone in her room; it is evening and she is sitting up in bed wearing pyjamas.

Hi! It is time for bed now. What happened today was that I went on Christmas holiday and I am now with my dad and his girlfriend. (She looks down and seems upset, and speaks softly with a low voice) I am not really sure how I feel right now . . . A bit mixed . . ., I am not sure (she looks around in the room, seeming thoughtful) . . . I am just really happy that I am not going to spend Christmas here. I really . . . look forward to going to [another part of the country] together with my mum and grandmother. And I miss Lisa and Martin [foster parents] so much! (Her voice cracks as she tears up.) But tomorrow we have this pre-Christmas and pre-birthday party and it will probably be nice enough. I will see how it goes, it is not such a long time, so . . . (She looks into the camera while she sighs.) Goodnight! (She gives a little wave into the camera and sends an air kiss.). (Veronica’s video 3, 01:03)

Although expressing uncertainty about her feelings being at her father’s house, Veronica clearly demonstrates sadness and uneasiness. By evaluating the time left at her father’s house before going to spend time with her birth mother and grandmother, she shows how she feels more emotionally attached to the two women. While she is highlighting the party the next day as ‘probably [. . .] nice enough’, she is also preparing herself for possible disappointment and reassuring herself that ‘it is not such a long time’. Veronica misses her foster parents, demonstrating a strong sense of belonging with them and the

video shows that their close relationship is not developed in a vacuum but linked to the emotional complexities she experiences in her relationship with her birth parents (Holland and Crowley, 2013). However, despite clearly missing her foster parents, Veronica manages to reconcile her sense of belonging to both her birth family members and to her foster care family.

In one video, Sara also speaks about her relationship with her birth mother:

[Cut] It works pretty well that I'm with the foster care family when it's like school days because then I get help with school and other problems . . . And if I think it becomes too much at the foster care family, I can just go home every other weekend and it's also really cool to get a breathing space from that [being in the foster care family]. [cut]. (Section from Sara's video 3, 04:10)

Besides again emphasising the more practical role that the foster care family has in her life, Sara also expresses how going home to her birth mother on the weekends means getting a 'breathing space'. In the foster care family, Sara experiences a constant pressure to perform and do well, and going home to her birth mother provides a breathing space where she can relax and just hang out. Sara speaks of her birth mother's home as 'going home', demonstrating that for Sara, a sense of emotional belonging is mainly with her birth mother where she has lived for most of her life.

## **Concluding discussion: Senses of belonging when living in foster care**

For most children, 'at home' is where their parents live. While it is common for Danish children today to have parents living apart and therefore to have more than one home, children in traditional foster care do not live with their parents but with other adults whom they do not know at the beginning of their placement. Their childhood is under official regulation and control, creating a unique family situation for the child that requires them to navigate between different, and often, opposite family settings. As both Sara and Veronica's videos show, managing this navigation of diverse family relationships is a negotiated accomplishment building on reflexive arguments.

For children in foster care placements, belonging is not just an unconscious everyday way of being. With time, as seen in Veronica's case, her relationships with foster parents became taken for granted and based on a sense of emotional belonging. Veronica also senses a physical belonging in the home of her foster family, thinking of the foster home, and not just her room, as her home. Veronica can be said to sense a belonging-in-place with identification to people, place, history and activities in the foster care family (Bennett, 2015). For Sara's senses of belonging appears to be more functionally based on her appreciation for her foster parents' help and support. In her videos, there is ambivalence in her senses of belonging as she wants to be part of the foster family, but at the same time feels an emotional distance with them. This tension between attachment and detachment is a well-described experience of children as they grow older and start forming their own youth lives (France, 2007). However, living in foster care and not feeling 'at home' in the foster family may intensify this experience for Sara. This demonstrates

that senses of belonging for foster care children are not merely a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' but also conditioned by the social context of foster care as a professional intervention (politics of belonging) (Antonsich, 2010).

In their video diaries, Veronica and Sara are both reflexive about their family life being different from that of most other children. Neither of them problematizes living in foster care families, but rather each sees it as the foundation for a highly functional everyday life. Nonetheless, both girls continue to have significant relationships with their birth families (Boddy, 2018; see also Holland and Crowley, 2013). Sara considers her birth mother's home to be her own and a place where she can relax and be at ease, escaping from performance pressure. Likewise, Veronica speaks with warmth of her connection with her birth mother and grandmother, demonstrating that these relationships with birth families are important and not automatically troubling in foster children's everyday life.

Veronica's and Sara's reflections in the videos are grounded in the concrete experiences of living in foster care away from their birth families, but also in the sense of no history of belonging and having to re-establish their senses of belonging. However, as argued by May (2011), such disruptive experiences can make room for seeing one's surroundings, experiences and future options in a new light, allowing, as both Sara and Veronica do in their videos, a reflexive focus on 'what could be', rather than just 'what is' or 'what has been'. Sara now sees herself as one who can perform well in school, and Veronica proudly tells how she adapts the role of a sister across family settings. Both girls' video diaries show that foster children's family relationships are not predetermined or exclusive but flexible and possibly open to multiple senses of belonging. Children's senses of belonging are not formed in a vacuum but in relation to the people they encounter, their histories and personal experiences. Foster care children share these conditions but also those unique to life with foster families.

Both girls share in their videos deeply felt and thoughtful insights about their everyday sense of belonging, allowing us a special view into what it feels like to be a child in foster care. However, it is important to stress that not all participating children produced similarly extensive diaries; some struggled with challenges such as inarticulateness and lack of concentration. Less visible challenges affecting foster care children such as lack of self-esteem, loneliness, and feeling neglected may not be captured in a video diary. Belonging (and/or non-belonging) for these children may be structured and experienced in different ways than those presented in our analysis of Veronica and Sara's videos. However, possibilities need to be explored in future studies employing different methods.

Veronica's and Sara's videos nonetheless show us that for children living in foster care, senses of belonging can take on different meanings and nuances and can be grounded in emotional, physical and functional attachments or some combination of these. Such attachments are always relational and created in connection with the material and structural conditions of their everyday lives. For children living in foster care, senses of belonging is not accomplished once and for all but is an ongoing process of feeling at home and being recognised as a rightful member of diverse family settings.

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## ORCID iD

Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4376-1198>

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**Author biographies**

Tea Torbenfeldt Bengtsson is a qualitative sociologist in the fields of childhood and youth studies, and social work. She has extensive experience in conducting qualitative studies with children and youth experiencing vulnerabilities and social problems. She has published books and articles in a variety of journals.

Stine Tankred Luckow is a qualitative sociologist who recently finished her PhD exploring everyday life in foster care families. Her research interests primarily revolve around family studies, social work and vulnerable children and families.